

JULIANNE HOUGH

Back at Center Stage!

THE DANCING WITH THE STARS PRO TALKS ABOUT HER BROADWAY DEBUT—AND BEING THE LEADING LADY OF HER OWN LIFE
By JEFF NELSON



Broadway Baby
Hough in *POTUS* with (from left) Suzy Nakamura, Vanessa Williams, Julie White, Lilli Cooper, Rachel Dratch and Lea DeLaria.

Julianne Hough is starring on Broadway—but not in a flashy musical, as most fans might expect. Instead, the *Dancing With the Stars* alum, who shot to fame as a sequin-spangled teen ballroom dancer before expanding her career as an actress and country singer, is showing off her comedy chops. In *POTUS: Or, Behind Every Great Dumbass Are Seven Women Trying to Keep Him Alive*, she plays a freewheeling farm girl who is more than meets the eye. “This play gives permission to women that all parts of us can exist, that we don’t need to be just one thing,” Hough, 33, says of the political satire, which opened April 27 and earned three Tony nominations on May 9.

The showbiz veteran knows what it’s like to be misjudged. “I think as a woman in general, you’re always going to be underestimated,” says Hough, who became a fan favorite in 2007, at age 18, when she joined *DWTS* as a pro. “In earlier stages of my career, there was a moment of needing to prove my worth. But as I’ve gotten older, I don’t feel the need to prove anything; I just am who I am.” Now, after a break from the spotlight—during which she

‘I lead with love. I’m excited to be in this state of openness’
—JULIANNE HOUGH

weathered a divorce—Hough is ready for her next chapter. “This,” she says, “is just the beginning.”

The Utah-born star’s life has changed drastically over the course of the pandemic. After some serious soul-searching, she ended her marriage to retired hockey pro Brooks Laich, 38. The pair separated amicably in May 2020, nearly three years after they wed, then finalized their divorce this February. “You think about what’s important and what you would be left with at the end of your life; it really clears out the clutter,” Hough says. “[It’s important to] clear space so that you can put your energy and your heart into the things that you’re really passionate about.” With Hollywood projects on pause, she dedicated time to self-discovery and expanding her businesses (Fresh Vine Wine, which she started with her friend actress Nina Dobrev, and KINRGY, her dance-based fitness program). “I tried to use that break as a personal-growth moment and to reconnect with friends and family and, most importantly, myself,” she says.

So when Broadway came calling, she jumped at the chance to make a fresh start in New York City. “This has been a dream of mine—not only to be a part of a show like this, but to be a part of the Broadway community,” says Hough, who has bonded with *POTUS*’s all-female cast, including Rachel Dratch and Vanessa Williams, who came to her aid when she caught COVID-19 during previews in April. “I truly feel a sisterhood. They’ve really shown me what friendship is.”

With heartache behind her, Hough is facing the future with renewed hope. “My heart is open. I’m leading with love but not necessarily searching for anything,” she says. “I’m focusing on the things that make me happy. I’m focusing on going to the flower shop and buying beautiful flowers to make my house feel great. And I’m focusing on being the best version of myself.” ●

Triple Threat



A Magical Start in Acting
In 2001 Hough (with Alfred Enoch and Rupert Grint) appeared as an extra in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*.

Dancing Queen
Hough (with Halia Castroneves in 2007) has won *DWTS* twice as a pro—and earned an Emmy for Outstanding Choreography.

Making Musical Hits
After starring in 2012’s film adaptation of *Rock of Ages*, Hough played Sandy in Fox’s 2016 production of *Grease Live!*

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: BRUCE GILKIN/WIREIMAGE; KEVIN STRAIN/FOX/GETTY IMAGES; CAROL KADLOR/ABC/GETTY IMAGES